



Dear Colleagues, Partners, and Friends,

Welcome to the RPGO Brief, USAID West Africa's Regional Peace and Governance Office's (RPGO) bimonthly newsletter of updates, programmatic highlights, and resources.

This issue's highlights include:

- The launch of a new activity focused on strengthening the capacity of Cameroonian civil society
- An infographic on RPGO's learning products
- A link to our recent learning circle on *the Implications of Recent Military Coups in West Africa on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Efforts*
- ECOWAS and USAID REWARD II's joint review on ECOWAS' interventions around elections and mediation processes in the region
- Insights on an interfaith dialogue in Bol, Chad

I hope you find this information interesting and helpful to your work.

Regards,

Richard Kimball
Office Director
Regional Peace and Governance Office
USAID West Africa

ACTIVITY UPDATES.

Strengthening Civil Society and Community Resilience Program (SCS-CRP)

Implementing Partner: FHI 360

New RPGO Activity on Strengthening Civil Society in Cameroon

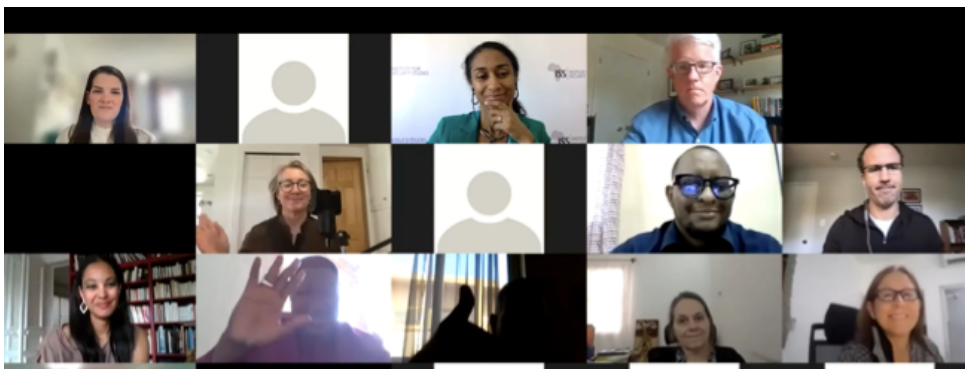


On March 2, 2022, RPGO signed on its newest activity, *Strengthening Civil Society and Community Resilience Program* (SCS-CRP). This is an \$11 million, five year cooperative agreement focused on strengthening Cameroonian civil society organizations' (CSOs) institutional capacities to prevent and counter violent extremism (P/CVE) at the community level through improved service delivery. One of the activity's sub-purposes is to increase women, girls, and youth's participation in such initiatives. The activity is currently in its inception phase and slated to end in March 2027. Keep an eye out in future newsletters for further activity updates!

Peace through Evaluation, Learning, and Adapting (PELA)

Implementing Partner: International Business & Technical Consultants Inc.

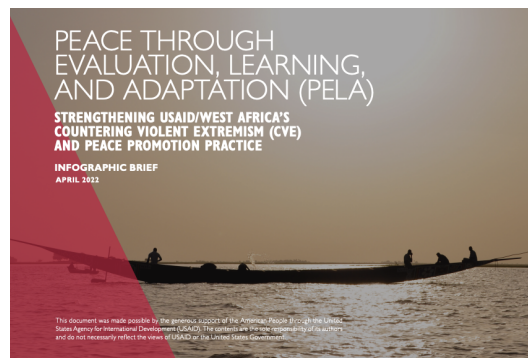
Learning Circle: The Implications of Recent Military Coups in West Africa on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Efforts



Screenshot of participants at the closing of PELA's virtual learning circle.

On Wednesday, April 27, 2022, PELA held its seventh learning circle on “The Implications of Recent Military Coups in West Africa on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Efforts.” The event featured experts Dr. Niagalé Bagayoko, Chair of the African Security Network, Dr. Lori-Anne Thérout-Bénoni, Regional Director at the Institute for Security Studies, and Dr. Julie Coleman, Senior Research Fellow and P/CVE Programme Lead at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism. A recording of the event can be found [here](#).

Infographic on the users and use of PELA’s services and products



OVERVIEW

PELA began in 2018 with the goal of strengthening USAID/West Africa's Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and peace promotion practice by facilitating continuous learning and knowledge sharing. Based in Accra, Ghana, PELA responds to the research and learning needs of USAID missions and implementing partners throughout the region. PELA contributes to strengthening USAID/West Africa's CVE and peace promotion practice by:

- Creating systems for continuous learning and knowledge sharing
- Building knowledge through monitoring, evaluation, and learning
- Analyzing and communicating knowledge through collaboration and learning events
- Utilizing knowledge through adaptation

PELA is successfully achieving its goal of strengthening USAID/West Africa's CVE and peace promotion practice through facilitating continuous learning and knowledge sharing among a community of USAID staff and partners working to address violent extremism through development programming.

EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

For the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021, PELA conducted an Annual Survey to obtain feedback from USAID personnel and partners on PELA-supported events, evaluations, analytical research, and learning products. Overall, the survey data support the conclusion that the activities implemented in FY 2021 contributed to enhancing USAID/West Africa's CVE and peace promotion effectiveness. These findings are consistent with evaluation results for specific PELA products and events.



PELA recently surveyed users of its learning services and products to get a snapshot of who they are and how they are using its products. 40 percent of respondents were from USAID and 60% were from implementing partners or other organizations, and all respondents indicated a high utility of PELA’s services and products. For example, 93% of respondents said they use PELA’s learning products and events to inform decisions, and 83% used PELA’s research products in this way. For additional insights and an overview of PELA’s products, please view [the full infographic here](#).

REACTING TO EARLY WARNING AND RESPONSE DATA II in WEST AFRICA PROGRAM (REWARD II)

Implementing Partner: Creative Associates International

ECOWAS and USAID REWARD II’s after-action review (AAR) of ECOWAS’ elections interventions and mediation



Participants of the After-Action Review, with ECOWAS's Director of Political Affairs Dr. Remi Ajibewa in the middle front row. (Photo credit: Obadiah Victor)

On April 5 and 6, 2022, USAID REWARD II and ECOWAS's Department of Political Affairs conducted a joint review of ECOWAS's preventive diplomacy and assistance towards building inclusive electoral processes in West Africa. The activity analyzed ECOWAS' support to member states on recent elections in Cabo-Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Niger, and The Gambia, as well as its engagement in resolving crises through preventive diplomacy and dialogue in Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Mali. The activity created an opportunity to reflect and learn about ECOWAS' role in carrying out its electoral assistance mandate, mediation, elections observation, and preventive diplomacy efforts in the region to promote democracy, peace, and security.

Drawing on the lessons learned in these countries over the last couple of years, recommendations were made on how to address identified gaps and sustain good practices to improve democratic governance in the ECOWAS community. The participants drafted a roadmap on how to implement these recommendations to ensure they are applied in future to improve ECOWAS' mediation and election assistance to the member states. Notably, ECOWAS committed to conducting a similar AAR of the Gambia's April 9 Parliamentary elections as well as implement AARs for future elections support across ECOWAS member states.

The Effect of Religious Education on Students' Perception of VE

Implementing Partner: ICRD in partnership with Salam Institute for Peace and Justice

Interfaith dialogue in Bol, Chad



Participants of ICRD and Salam Institute's interfaith dialogue in Bol, Chad (Photo credit: ICRD)

On March 30, ICRD held an interfaith dialogue in Bol, Chad to promote and enhance the rapprochement between Muslim and Christian leaders. The overarching theme of the one-day event was on the culture of peace, with discussions on Christian and Islamic visions of peace, interreligious dialogue, and the fight against violent extremism. The opening session was chaired by the Mayor of Bol, which was then followed by a panel, interfaith breakout groups, and a communal lunch. One of the dialogue sessions centered on the shared values of the two religions, namely love, peace, respect for human dignity, tolerance, acceptance of the other, and opposition to everything that could harm the human being. Through the discussions, the event was able to correct misconceptions and preconceived notions about the other religion and ultimately reinforce the social cohesion between the two parties. A post-attitudinal survey showed strong alignment among participants on the importance of equal rights for both Christians and Muslims in Chad, including having the freedom to practice their religions.

The facilitators and participants were equally represented by Muslims, Christians, women, and men, with a total of 40 participants.

RESOURCES

Letter from the President on the Implementation of the Global Fragility Act

“From strengthening social institutions and state-society relations, **to mitigating the spread of extremist ideologies**, to confronting the corrosive impact of gender inequality, to cultivating greater trust between security forces and citizens, to guarding against the destabilizing threat of climate change — we will help foster locally led, locally owned solutions grounded in mutual trust and long-term accountability.”

Read more from the [letter from the President on the implementation of the Global Fragility Act](#).

Upcoming event on Race, Power, and Peacebuilding

Join Peace Direct for the launch of their new report, “[Race, Power & Peacebuilding](#)”, on May 12, 2022. This event will be an opportunity to engage further with the decolonising agenda and ask questions about the report. The event will review key findings and a moderated discussion, in which panelists will share their thoughts on how the peacebuilding sector can be more equitable, sustainable, and locally-led moving forward. [Register here for the event](#).

RESEARCHER'S DIGEST.



A displaced person builds a shelter at the Mentao Nord camp in Burkina Faso. (Photo: Pablo Tosco/Oxfam)

1. Anouar Boukhars. Trajectories of Violence Against Civilians by Africa's Militant Islamist Groups. Africa Center for Strategic Studies, Spotlights. February 8, 2022.
<https://africacenter.org/spotlight/trajectories-of-violence-against-civilians-by-africas-militant-islamist-groups/>

In this article, Anouar Boukhars argues that the increase in extremist group violence against civilians in Africa's five major theaters of Islamist violence (the Sahel, Somalia, the Lake Chad Basin, northern Mozambique, and North Africa) has been due to various context-specific factors. The author reviews militant Islamic group violence against civilians in Africa, highlighting the ways civilians are often targeted. The instrumentalized use of violence against civilians is the crux of the problem that he argues needs to be addressed through a reassessment and retargeting of responses. The increase in violence against civilians has roots in extremist group dynamics - for instance, operating in an area marked by easily exploitable inter-group antagonisms and weak organizational structures (where militant groups cannot restrain their undisciplined soldiers) - as well as heavy-handed government responses to extremist violence that can be seen as exacting collective punishment, either by its soldiers or mercenaries. The author discusses several approaches that governments can take to reduce violence against civilians, underscoring how responses must be attuned to local specificities and demands and prioritized to prevent militant Islamist groups from exploiting existing communal tensions. These include: training and deploying professional security forces who are more respectful of human rights; enhancing government and civil society efforts to ease ethnic tensions by facilitating non-violent approaches to conflict resolution; and, establishing transparent land use and property rights.

2. Leif Brottem. The Growing Threat of Violent Extremism in Coastal West Africa. Africa Center for Strategic Studies, Spotlights. March 15, 2022.

In this article, Leif Brottem contends that Islamist groups have been making inroads in the border areas of the West African littoral states by capitalizing on grievances held by pastoralist communities. In Burkina Faso, Mali and western Niger, militant violence increased by 70% in 2021, with Burkina Faso now accounting for 58% of all violent events in the Sahel. Islamist groups have recruited young livestock herders by playing on their grievances, including farmer-herder tensions over land and distrust of the government. The Beninois government has inadvertently facilitated these recruiting efforts through policies that banned the entry of foreign livestock and 'sedentarizing' local pastoralists. The author concludes that the expansion of militant Islamist groups from the Sahel into coastal states is far from a certainty, despite the growing threat. He argues for several policies that will protect pastoralism livelihoods and ways of life in order to counteract the trend of militant groups' recruiting of pastoralists. Governments should increase efforts to protect livestock corridors and herders' legal resource rights. Customary village-level authorities can resolve land and other disputes between herders and farmers before they escalate into conflict. Security measures can be enhanced in wilderness areas used by militant Islamist groups (but governments need to avoid undermining human security in neighboring communities). Also, programs designed to prevent increases in anti-pastoralist attitudes and rhetoric should be implemented.

3. Hassane Kone et Ornella Moderan. Dialoguer avec les Djihadistes: Enseignements Mauritaniens pour le Sahel. Institut d'Études de Sécurité, ISS Today. 28 mars 2022
<https://issafrica.org/fr/iss-today/dialoguer-avec-les-djihadistes-enseignements-mauritaniens-pour-le-sahel>

Hassane Kone Ornella Moderan examines Mauritania's dialogue experience with jihadist groups, to offer lessons for other Sahelian countries that are considering talks with violent extremist groups. The author describes the emerging consensus for a political approach to countering violent extremism that includes talks with insurgent groups. A growing acknowledgement that military operations have not brought peace coincides with France's declining influence that used to make the notion of dialogue taboo. With this backdrop, the author takes a careful look at Mauritania's 2010 experience, which centered on an ideological dialogue with 70 detainees to unpack the reasons for their radicalization and reintegrate them back into society. Religious dignitaries reached consensus on the non-violent ideal of jihad, and 47 of the detainees committed to laying down arms and renouncing extremist ideas, for which they were rewarded with pardons, reduced sentences and support to reintegrate economically and socially. The author concludes that while this approach has enabled Mauritania not experience any terrorist attacks since 2011, it would likely be insufficient for success in the central Sahel given the multiplicity of groups, the higher levels of violence and the existence of other drivers of violent extremism, that are not ideological. Looking also at the downsides of Mauritania's dialogue experience, they conclude that in order for ideological debate to be useful, it will need to part of a coordinated regional approach that also addresses other reasons for joining jihadist groups.

4. Thomas Jakana. Gendered Security Sector Reform: What Can We Learn from Women's Participation in Community-Based Armed Groups? RESOLVE Network, Policy Note. February 2022.

https://www.resolve.net.org/system/files/2022-02/RSVE%20Policy%20Note_Thomas_February%202022.pdf

This policy note by Jakana Thomas addresses the schism between the important role that women play in community security and their absence from discussions on such matters. The policy note outlines and expounds on insights from a recent study by the author on women's participation in West African community based armed groups (CBAGS). The key point is that women's involvement and integration in security is crucial to improving security and well-being for all. He notes that while African states have been at the forefront of embracing the global Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda and its attendant calls for gendered security sector reform, implementation of such plans has been challenging for several reasons. Thomas goes on to offer a set of key insights and considerations for policymakers and practitioners when devising and integrating efforts for gendered security sector reform. This begins with ways to leverage women's unique contributions. Next, recognizing women's contributions to security is proposed as a way to capture and replicate the lessons learned. Finally, the benefits of including women in demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) programs are highlighted with some detail. In summary, Thomas argues that in order for DDR programs to contribute to long-term peace and stability, they must acknowledge and accommodate the full range of conflict actors. For this he offers three practical recommendations: 1. DDR programs should have specific provisions for militias to prevent further conflict; 2. Practitioners, funders and stakeholders should ensure that more women have access to DDR benefits; and, 3. Policymakers should not prioritize men's participation in DDR over that of women.

5. Paulin Maurice Toupane, Adja Khadidiatou Faye, Aïssatou Kanté, Mouhamadou Kane, Moussa Ndour, Cherif Sow, Bachir Ndaw, Tabara Cissokho et Younoussa Ba. Prévenir l'Extrémisme Violent au Sénégal. Les Menaces Liées à l'Exploitation Aurifère. Institut d'Études de Sécurité (ISS), Rapport sur l'Afrique de l'Ouest N°36 - Décembre 2021.

<https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/war-36-FR-2.pdf>

This report outlines the findings of a joint study implemented by the Centre des Hautes Etudes de Défense et de Sécurité (CHEDS) and the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) from September 2019 through October 2021 that sought to analyze the risks associated with gold mining in the Kédougou and Tambacounda regions of Senegal and how they could contribute to the expansion of violent extremist groups into West African littoral states. The study was based on 150 semi-structured interviews and 15 focus group discussions. After presenting the research methodology, the article provides an overview of the regional security context. This is characterized by the expansion of violent extremist groups and their attraction to the gold mining areas. Strategies that groups use to establish themselves in the Sahel are detailed, followed by an analysis of the vulnerabilities linked to gold mining in the Kédougou and Tambacounda

regions that could be exploited by these groups. The findings reveal that gold mining is at risk of providing a source of funding for violent extremism. The resources that finance this mining come from obscure sources that increase the risks of money laundering and terrorist financing. Additional vulnerabilities revealed are economic exclusion; disruptions of social relations and conflict stemming from large migratory and financial flows; and the criminal economy generated from illicit cross-border trafficking. Finally, the environmental and health impacts of gold mining were found to likely exacerbate the vulnerabilities found. The report provides a number of recommendations for averting worst-case scenarios in south-eastern Senegal, concluding that integrated responses, design to be mutually reinforcing and a difference in the short, medium and long term must be used.

6. Remadji Hoinathy and Teniola Tayo. Lake Chad Basin Socio-economic resilience in the shadow of Boko Haram. Institute for Security Studies (ISS)- West Africa report No 38. March 2022. <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/war-38.pdf>

This report by Remadji Hoinathy and Teniola Tayo presents evidence-based analysis to support and enhance ongoing resilience-building processes in the Lake Chad Basin (LCB). The fragility of the LCB coupled with Boko Haram violence has worsened security dynamics, and this has necessitated national, regional and global attention, along with interventions aimed to address the situation. According to the authors, Boko Haram has taken advantage of the contested presence of the state and the marginalization of communities to gain a foothold and generate revenue by taking over and controlling economic opportunities. Many producers and economic actors in the LCB region have been bankrupted through looting and destruction of their property, loss of markets, government bans on products and closure of traditional trade routes. In addition to the insecurity caused by Boko Haram and its hold on economic activities, state counterinsurgency responses have also damaged production, transportation and trade. The study used a multi-site methodology that deployed research teams in all eight LCB regions directly affected by Boko Haram. It then combined both primary and secondary data, and also conducted key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Specific research sites were chosen for their relevance to economic production, transport channels and market hubs. According to the authors, there is an urgent need for the state's presence in peripheral areas to be reinforced through provision of basic services, development, civil protection and strengthening of human rights in addition to military presence. They further added that there is the need to also secure communities and trade routes by developing more effective military engagement along with appropriate civil protection.